



"In the Realm of the Monochrome," installation view, 1992. Photo courtesy of Levy Gallery, Moore College of Art and Design.

In the Realm of the Monochrome

Levy Gallery, Moore College of Art and Design
20th and the Parkway
Philadelphia, 215/568-4515

Since Rodchenko's 1921 triptych of the primary colors, "monochrome" has connoted a rigorous

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dialogue with the fundamental mechanisms of painting free from exterior meanings and associations. However, as critic Arthur C. Danto pointed out in his lecture accompanying this show, artists have also used monochrome—with its removal of the distractions of manipulation of form—as an arena open to explorations of intuitive, conceptual, and spiritual experience. In the latter tradition Levy Gallery curator Richard Torchia found a theme with surprising resonance among artists in Philadelphia, where such a reductive formalism is certainly not a common taste or practice. Indeed, Torchia considered more artists for this 23-person show than he has for any other in the last five years.

Monochrome has been a useful touchstone for many artists here, but a primary practice for only a few. Artists in the show ranged from gestural abstractionists to those best known for figurative or landscape imagery. Quentin Morris, whose 30-year dedication to the application of black pigment to a variety of supports, as an affirmation of self and spiritual identity, is the purest example in show, although Barbara Daring has also begun a body of monochromatic paintings. Paint used as a monochrome material object informs Stephen Riedell's crushed and re-stretched canvas, Sid Sachs's coil of felt held in place on one end with a layer of Rhoplex,

and Bill Walton's typical sculptural use of a monochrome layer of paint in assemblage with other primary materials.

Abstract painters of a sensual, painterly bent—John Dowell, During, Neysa Grassi, Morris, Warren Rohrer—showed meditative work generated through obsessive physical processes. Other painters—Mary Murphy, Darwin Nix, Sandra Soley—derive their work from intellectual or psychological investigations, and it is generally through the pursuit of such conceptual ends that the majority of these artists come to monochrome. Marcia Kocot and Tom Hatten re-engage Rodchenko by hanging three monochromes from ropes, each inside a cubical welded steel frame. Shorn from the wall, these paintings dangle like dried specimens displayed far from their natural habitat. Frank Galuszka's 1970 triptych *After Dinner Mints* was derived from a parodic text he collaged from classic color theories, and reflects the interest in speculative theorizing which underlies his later work with allegorical and other imagery. Tom Chimes's portraits of symbolist poets, their meanings already over-determined by the artist's immersion into the poets' lives and interconnections with classical and modern myths, have evolved by degrees into silvery surfaces marked with barely perceptible, though extremely precise, schematic images—a kind of obverse of the horror vacui found in outsider art. Salvador Casco's bleached love letters, Anthony-Petr Gorny's Yves Klein recreations, and Howard Hussey's reification of his mystical tract *Momentary Law* further exploit the availability of monochrome to the hidden and the ineffable, revealing the "Blank Plenitudes" of Danto's lecture.

Not for sale.

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